



Anna J Stewart

*CREATING REALISTIC & BELIEVABLE MOTIVATION FOR (ALL) YOUR CHARACTERS*

# Tell Me the Why

Where did the inspiration for  
this presentation come  
from?

# WHY DID THEY STEAL THE JEWELS?



For the challenge?

For the thrill?

For money?

RISK IT



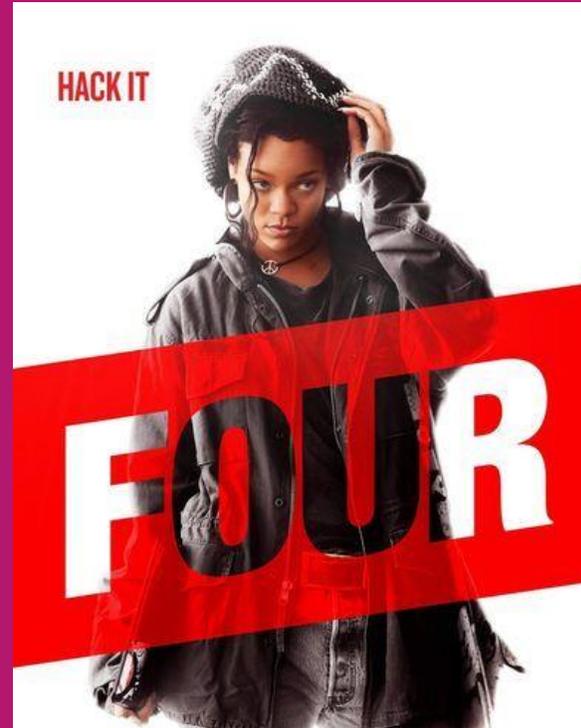
Lou

TAKE IT



Constance

HACK IT



Nine Ball

WEAR IT



Daphne

For friends?

Tammy



Challenge

Amita



Freedom

Debbie



Revenge



# Survival

- Pay off her debt to the IRS
- Stay out of prison
- Save her business/reputation

We writers are all part of  
one big club:

The screen talkers club.

Establishing proper motivation from page one, with consistent behavior around that motivation, is essential to moving your characters through the story to a satisfying and logical end (ie: romance~HEA or HFN).

Your characters' motivations, WHY they want what they want (goal), must\* be front and center early on in your story.

That reason must hold significant stakes for whether they accomplish their goal, or they don't.

If nothing changes, what was the point?

Debra Dixon, author of *Goal, Motivation, and Conflict*, defines motivation as:

**that which drives your character to obtain or achieve their goal. It is the WHY and implicitly asks why the reader should care.**

# Why the WHY belongs in your writing arsenal.

- Helps to define and clarify the characters' goals and conflicts
- Defines and establishes the "story stakes"
  - What happens if your characters do or do not achieve their goals?
  - What changes?
- We, as the reader, need to CARE if they accomplish those goals
- If we don't care, we won't read.

# What if they didn't succeed?



- Debbie's still an ex-con without money. She's done that before.
- Lou, Constance, Tammy, and Nine Ball remain as they were, grifting and getting by.
- Amita still lives with her mother.
- Daphne still doesn't have friends.
- Rose goes to prison, goes bankrupt, and loses everything.

*When motivation is not clearly defined, everything else falls flat and the story becomes forgettable.*

**BUT**

*When motivation is defined, clearly and concisely, the story reaches up and pulls the reader IN.*

## Creating strong motivation (on BOTH your protagonists' parts):

- Helps to build and enhance internal AND external conflict
- Moves the story forward
- It's not just the goals they need to keep in their sight.
- It's the reasons WHY they have those goals\*.

*\*Yes, the goals can change throughout the story. But that is only believable IF you've established not only the WHY behind that goal, but the WHY behind the change.*



# ALASKA DAILY



# STUMPTOWN



It doesn't matter whether your character's motivation is right or wrong.

What matters is that it's believable and understandable, even if you (or your reader) don't personally agree with it.

Especially when it comes to villains.

It is never\* enough for your villain's motivation to be only that they are evil.

- Socio or psychopathic + MORE
- Give them layers
- Greed
- Joy/sexual release/thrill from killing
- Desperate for that high of accomplishment
- Inflicting terror
- Ground it in real life
- Revenge (with an explanation)

*Be very cautious when using mental illness as a rationale.*

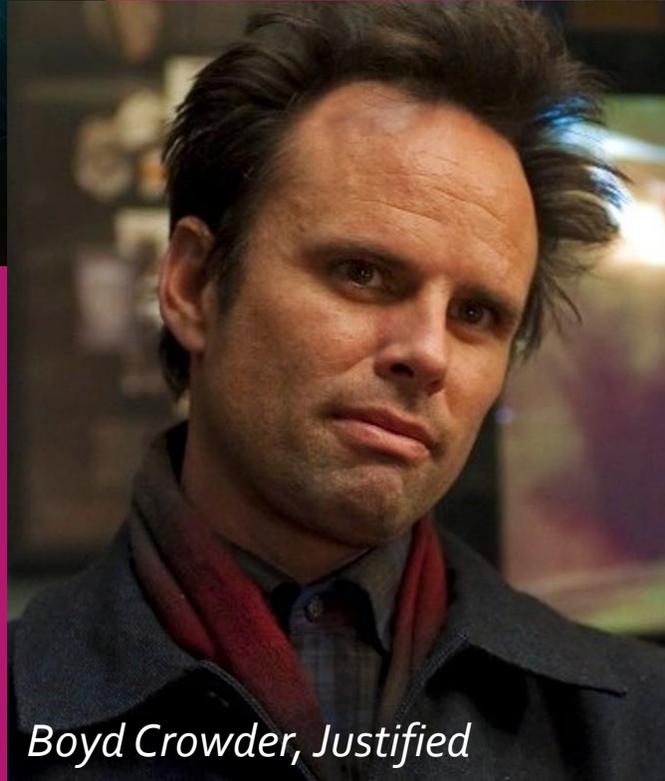




*Xu Wenwu/The Mandarin*



*Kingpin, Daredevil*



*Boyd Crowder, Justified*



*Homelander, The Boys*

# Timing is Everything

## Character Dependent

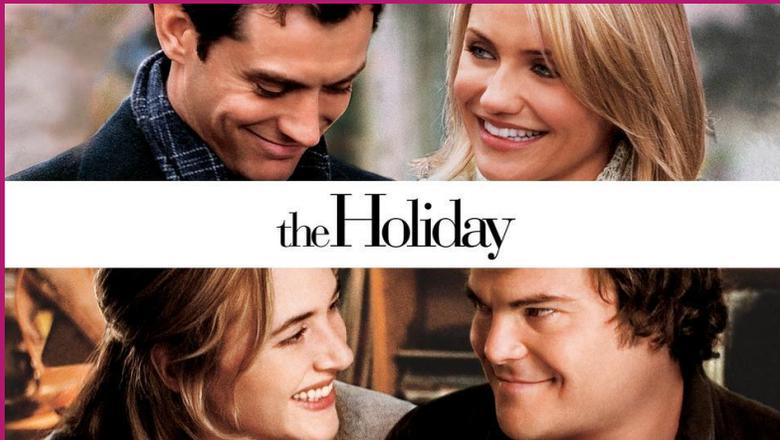
- Protagonist: Get the reader on their side.
- Antagonist: Trickle in/big reveal
- Secondary: Plot fodder

## Genre Dependent

- Romance: up front and center (adds to conflict between protagonists)
- Mystery/Suspense/Thrillers/Horror: Gradual/big reveal/Ah-Ha moment
- Science Fiction: See above/either/or
- Fantasy: See Science Fiction

# Can you identify a story by its MOTIVATION?

Two women change their lives. Why?



To get over a broken heart.



Escape a boring marriage & embrace an adventure.



Break the cycle of addiction & bad mothering.

None of their lives will be the same at the end.

# MOTIVATION EXAMPLES:

Whether they are positive or negative motivations depends on your story.

- Love
- Loyalty
- Protection
- Survival
- Pressure
- Curiosity
- Guilt
- Desire
- Instability
- Death
- Loss
- Pride
- Jealousy
- Honor
- Hate
- Greed
- Lust
- Revenge
- Regret
- Shame
- Obedience
- Inequality

# Motivation in Relation to Conflict

*Conflict is, according to Mary Buckham, a clash of belief systems.*

Two people going after the same thing (GOAL) for  
*different* reasons (WHY) = CONFLICT

Two people going after the same thing (GOAL) for  
the *same* reason (WHY) = CONFLICT

# What strong, believable motivation can bring to your story:

Enhances and strengthens character, plot, and the romance itself.

Opposing motivations are as strong, if not stronger, than opposing conflicts

- Especially when the goal is shared

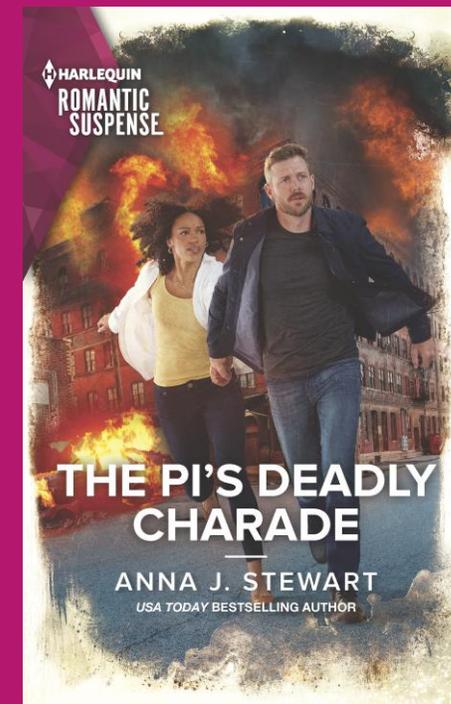
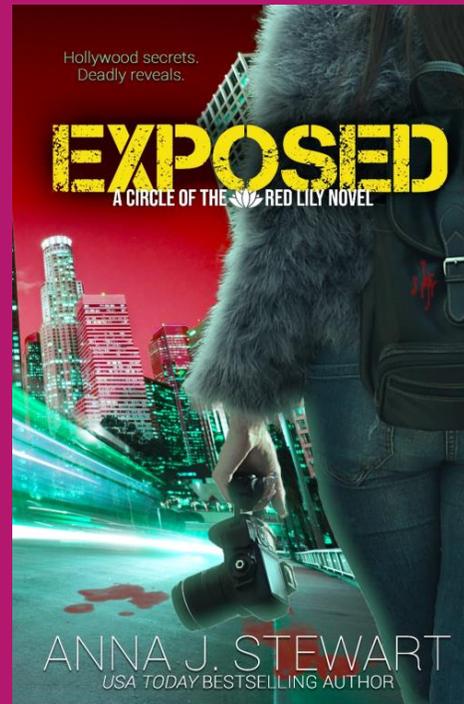
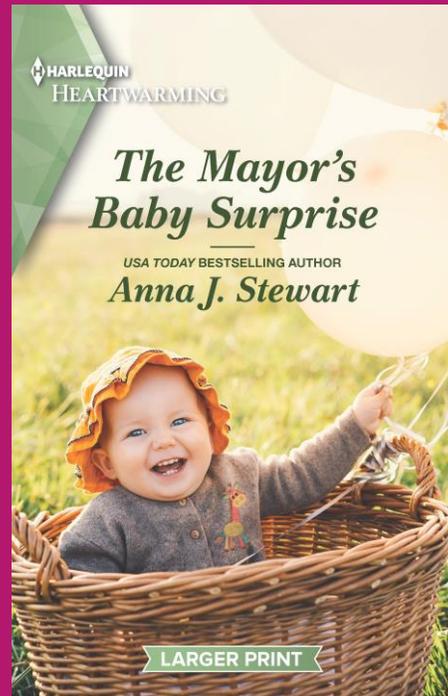
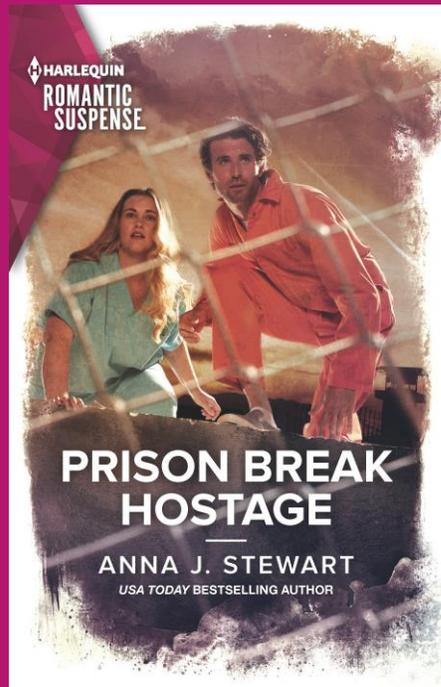
- Something important is at stake

Opposite goals also work

- Opposite goals, different motivation = clash of belief/conflict

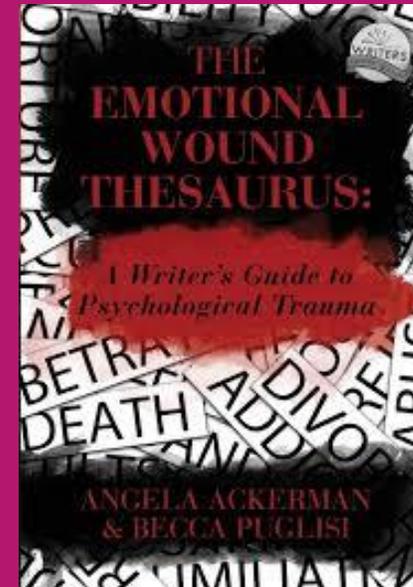
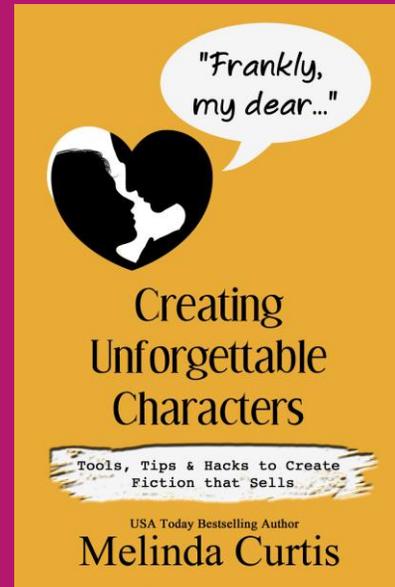
*Romance specific: can also help you determine who your central love interests are.*

# Motivations influenced by conflict OR conflict influenced by motivations?



How do you uncover your  
character's (or characters')  
motivation?

**Emotional Wound:** a negative experience (or set of experiences) that causes pain on a deep psychological level. It is a lasting hurt that often involves someone close: a family member, lover, mentor, friend, or other trusted individuals. ([www.WritersHelpingWriters.com](http://www.WritersHelpingWriters.com))



Use your characters' emotional wounds, inflicted on them at some point in their lives, to connect with the core of who they are. Those wounds help determine who they are now, in your story, including how they do everything in their lives, and, more importantly, what motivates them.

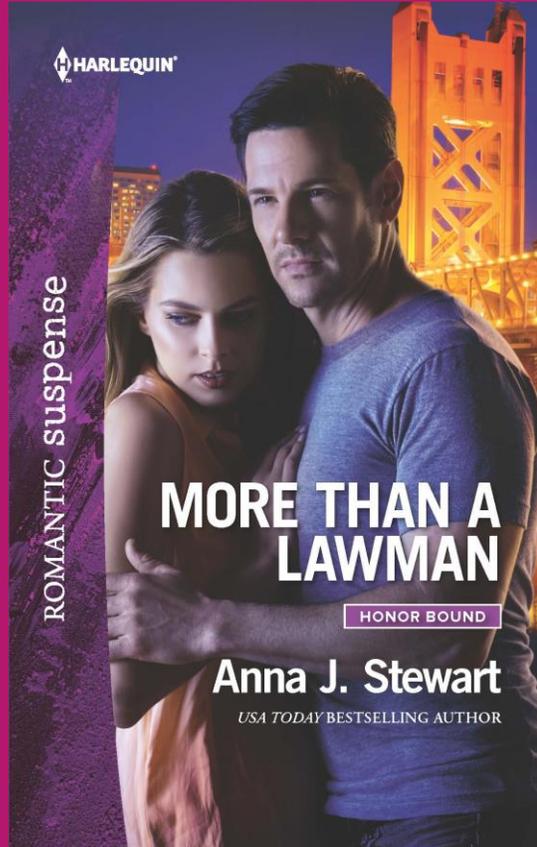
# The deepest emotional wounds are inflicted during childhood.

- Trauma and abandonment are going to create an entirely different person than someone who grew up in a wonderful, supportive, extensive family.
- Childhood imprints on us and affect us.
  - Because of my own complicated and virtually non-existent relationship with my father, I tend to write either very idealized, perfect father figures or crappy, horrible ones.

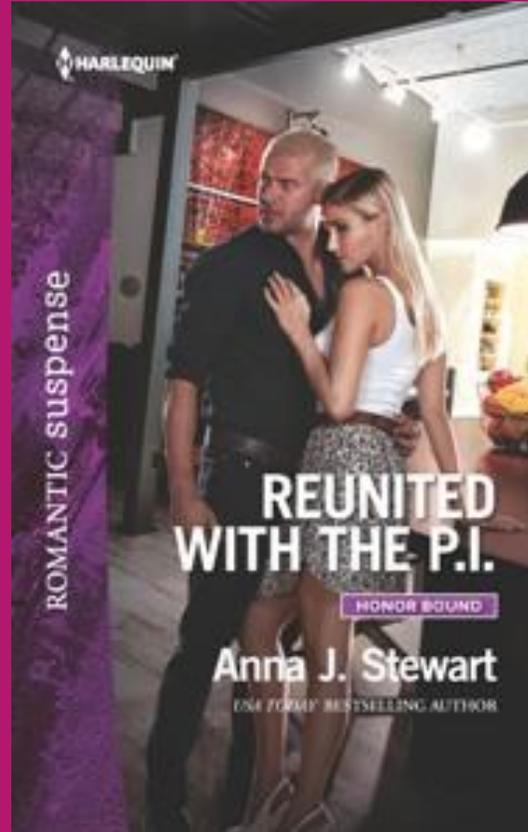
# Other background issues to draw from (a FEW):

- Family relationships/dynamics
- Expectations/hopes/dreams fulfilled/unfulfilled
- Sudden trauma
- Unexpected life events
  - *Divorce, death, accidents, loss, natural disasters, injury, witnessing a crime/incident...*

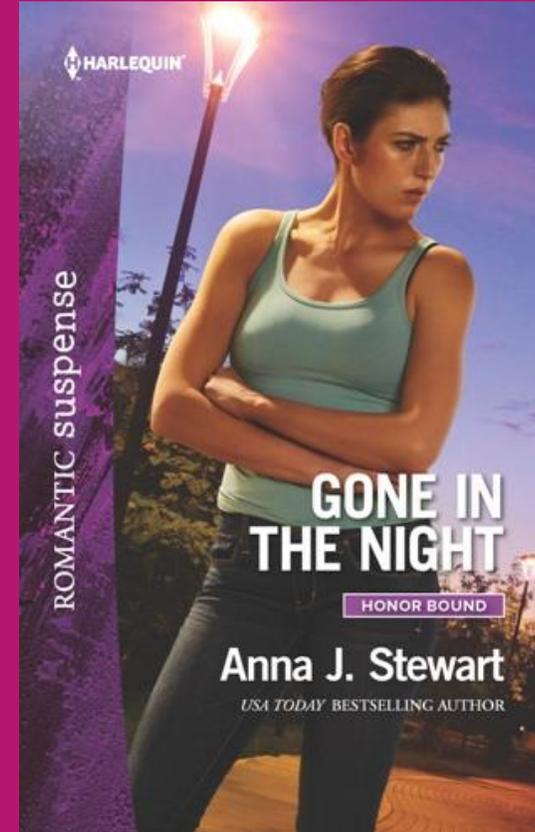
# Honor Bound Trilogy



**Eden**  
Reporter/Blogger  
Crusader



**Simone**  
Lawyer/DA  
Avenger



**Allie**  
Psychologist (criminal and child)  
Counselor

*Motivation is a shortcut to defining your character.*

# Bosch

Character Motto:  
Everyone matters,  
or no one matters.



# Advice regarding unexpected life events and trauma

- Every experience, good and bad, shapes us as people; the same goes for your characters.
- Trauma does not have to have occurred in childhood.
- Others' experiences might not be yours; your experience won't be anyone else's. Be respectful of both.
- No two characters, just as no two people, REACT to trauma in the same way.
- There is no one cure for all trauma or being affected by an unexpected event.
- Do your research and be as accurate and realistic as you can. This is a responsibility.
- Should be a no judgement zone (on both the writer and readers' side)

# Story Stakes

The *motivation* for your characters , the WHY they want what they want, must be strong enough that life will never be the same whether they fail or whether they succeed.

By the end of the story your character/s should:

- Make a decision they would not have made at the beginning
- Be affected to the point that life will never be the same
- If nothing changes for anyone, what was the point?

# Motivation, like goals, can change throughout the story.

- The stakes can increase or decrease depending on the goals and conflicts, but there should always be an impact on the EMOTIONAL conflict your characters deal with as a result.
- Resentment, relief, excitement, or betrayal come about more fully when change, or even the prospect of change is close.
- Or just out of reach.

# SECONDARY & SUPPORTING CHARACTERS



# In Depth Motivation Examination

Superhero stories are a goldmine for exploring motivation (usually). Especially if they are ORIGIN stories.





## To review MOTIVATION:

- The WHY your character wants what they want can be a writer's best friend.
- Can unlock secret doors into the character's psyche (gives readers more insight and YOU more to work with)
- Adds to and enhances conflict even as the goals might change

## BONUS!

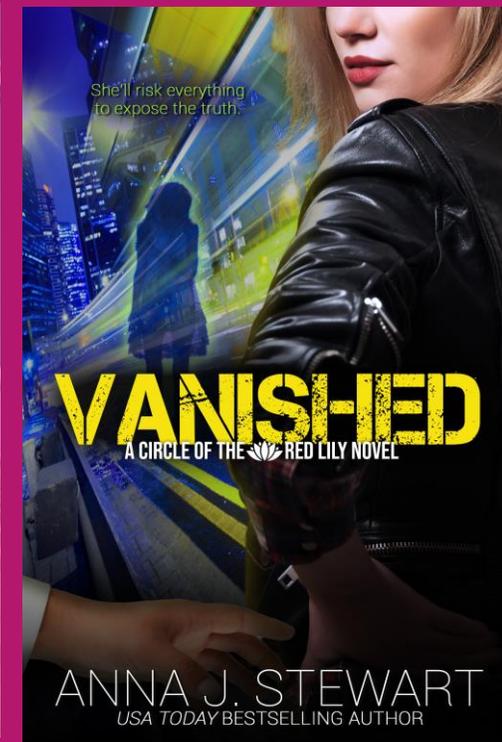
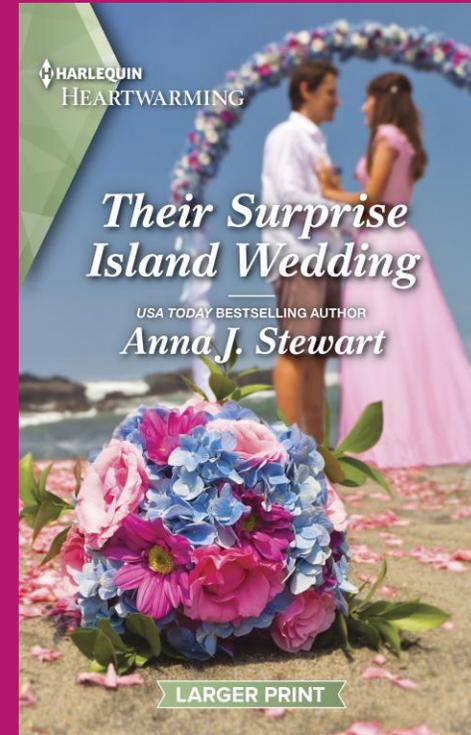
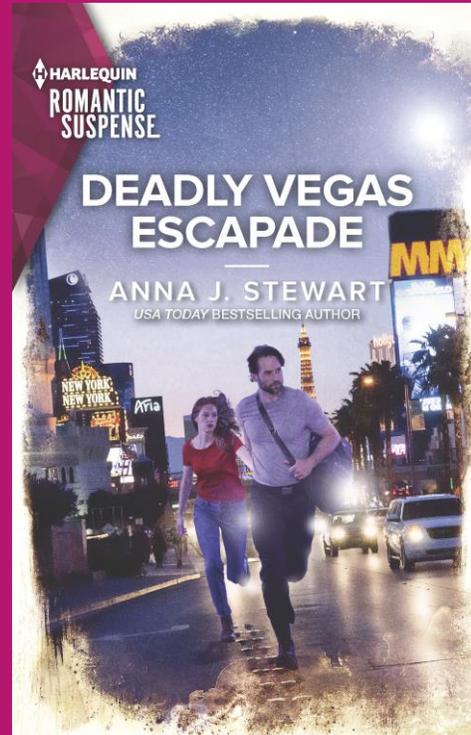
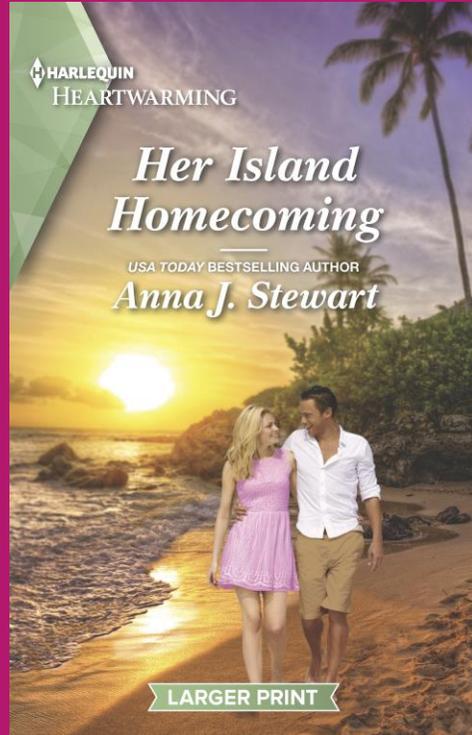
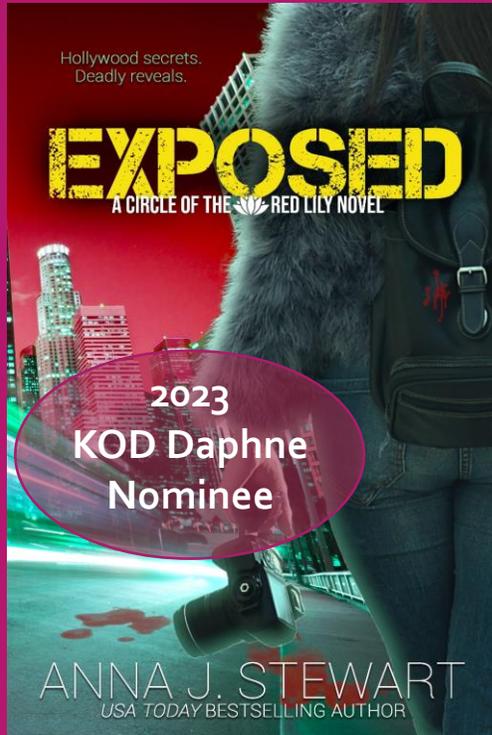
*Motivation can be a roadmap to get you back on track if you lose your way in the story.*

- Where did you go wrong?
- Circle back to what happens if your character fails in achieving their goal.
- Or if your character succeeds.

Out Now

Out 9/26

Out 11/21



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Stay safe, stay healthy,  
and keep writing!